

The national park is the best idea America ever had. —James Bryce

Virginia and the National Park Service (NPS) have worked closely for many years to protect and conserve the important resources and rich heritage of the Commonwealth. The partnership has resulted in the creation of a network of river corridors, trails, heritage sites and conservation areas that bring numerous benefits to the citizens of Virginia. The following section provides a brief overview of the agency's mission, programs, opportunities and challenges facing the National Park Service in Virginia.

Findings

- The NPS presence in Virginia results in more than 14 million visitors to national parks, generating \$263 million and providing 6,100 jobs statewide.
- Although some parks, such as Assateague Island, Prince William Forest Park and Richmond National Battlefield have seen significant increases in visitation, the total visits to national parks in Virginia decreased slightly from 15,237,960 in fiscal year 2000 to 14,974,938 in fiscal year 2005, which is a decrease of 1.7 percent.
- Spending at NPS sites in Virginia was reported at \$263 million in 2005, resulting in approximately 2 percent of total travel expenditures in the state.
- In Virginia, NPS manages 20 parks with a combined acreage of approximately 400,000 acres.
- NPS enhances the capacity of states, communities and private organizations through its partnership programs.



Old Rag Mountain in Shenandoah National Park. Photo by NPS.

Recommendations

- State and local entities should continue to develop multi-modal connections to NPS sites as a component of an interconnected, statewide system of trails and greenways. Support efforts underway at parks, such as Petersburg, Appomattox and Richmond, that are currently engaged in efforts to link battlefields, historic sites, parks and communities.
- NPS should work with state agencies to elevate battlefield protection in various land conservation, scenic viewshed and heritage preservation initiatives. Utilize partnerships to identify, prioritize and develop strategies to protect critical resources.
- NPS should continue collaborative efforts with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Department of Conservation and Recreation, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Virginia Tourism Corporation to market heritage tourism and recreation opportunities.
- State and local entities should continue collaborative efforts through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and Water Trails Program and Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail to connect people to heritage, outdoor recreation, and educational opportunities and resources.
- Partnerships should be expanded between NPS, natural resource agencies and monitoring networks to address critical information gaps related to the monitoring of park vital signs and develop strategic plans to address issues.
- NPS and state and local entities should foster communication with state highway planners to identify alternative solutions that will minimize impacts from highways that bisect parklands.
- NPS should work with DCR and other federal, state, local and nonprofit partners to develop and implement a statewide green infrastructure program.
- NPS and localities should explore ways to enhance the physical and mental well-being of all citizens in Virginia through partnerships with DCR, Department of Health and others from the health community to promote active outdoor recreation and nature-based activities.
- DCR should take the lead on meeting with the NPS to discuss access issues that have arisen on specific NPS parks around the state.

National Park Service in Virginia

Units of the National Park System:	20
National Heritage Areas:	1
Affiliated Areas:	3
National Natural Landmarks:	10
National Historic Landmarks:	117
Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Projects (2006):	12
Chesapeake Watershed Assistance Projects (2006):	3
Land and Water Conservation Funding (2006):	\$762,273
Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails (2005):	\$384,000

Economic Impact of Park Units

(does not include affiliated areas)

2005 Visitation:	14,520,721
Economic Impact:	\$263 million
Local jobs supported:	6,100 jobs

(Source: Visitation data reported by NPS Public Use Statistics Office, Economic Impacts reported by NPS Social Science Program, Gramann)

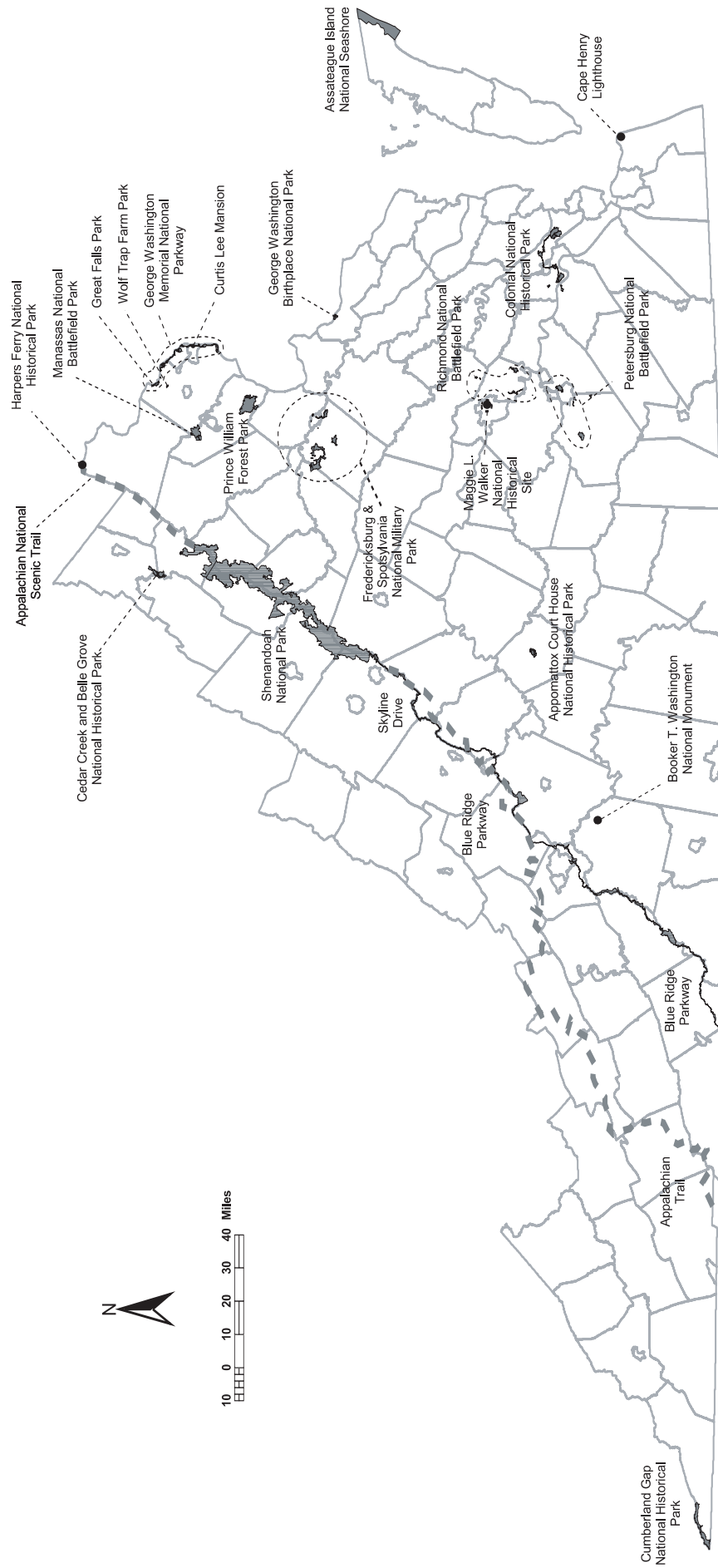
Mission, responsibilities and authority

NPS proudly carries out its mission of promoting, preserving and protecting parks and other heritage resources for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of current and future generations. The founding legislation of the agency, The National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, is the source for the agency's current mission statement:

"The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The National Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world."

In addition to managing units of the National Park System, NPS provides technical assistance in resource conservation planning to citizen's groups, local governments, and state and federal agencies. The following laws define these programmatic responsibilities and provide the broad context within which the NPS accomplishes its mission.

- The Antiquities Act
- The Historic Sites Act



- The Redwood National Park Expansion Act
- The National Trail System Act
- The Wilderness Act
- The Endangered Species Act
- The General Authorities Act
- The National Historic Preservation Act
- The National Environmental Policy Act
- The Outdoor Recreation Resources Act
- The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act
- The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System Act
- The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act

NPS operations are guided by a performance management system established in 1993 by Congress with the passage of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). There are four goal categories established through GPRA:

1. Preserve park resources.
2. Provide for the public enjoyment and visitor experience of the parks.
3. Strengthen and preserve natural and cultural resources and enhance recreational opportunities managed by partnerships.
4. Ensure organizational effectiveness.

Each NPS unit provides an annual performance report that documents progress in meeting these goals.



Interpretive wildflower program in Shenandoah National Park. Photo by NPS.

In 2005, under the leadership of National Park Service Director Fran Mainella, a four-year strategic plan was completed to help guide the agency into the 21st century. The plan, *National Park Service Legacy Initiative and 4-Year Plan, Doing Business in the 21st Century*, outlines five broad goals to help keep the mission of NPS vital and to ensure its effective and efficient management. These goals, which provide overall policy guidance for NPS sites in Virginia, are management excellence, sustainability, conservation, outdoor recreation and 21st century relevancy.

Five goals from NPS strategic plan

Management Excellence: The National Park Service promotes management excellence and will epitomize government accountability. We will be a highly transparent organization whose productive, safe workforce reflects the diversity of our country and uses effective business practices to fulfill our core work.

Sustainability: The National Park Service will pursue sustainable facilities, operations, business practices, and resources through conservation, design, fiscal responsibility, information technology, partnerships, philanthropic support, and positive relationships with Congress.

Conservation: The National Park Service will continue to be a leader in natural and cultural resource conservation, protection, restoration, and stewardship. We will accomplish our work through partnerships with educational institutions, inter-governmental organizations, at local, state and federal levels, and interest groups.

Outdoor recreation: People's enjoyment and appreciation for the National Park Service is essential to its conservation. The NPS embraces critical responsibility to provide appropriate outdoor recreation and to contribute to the physical and mental well-being of all Americans. We will provide these opportunities through the National Park System and through our role in a seamless network of parks.

21st century relevancy: The NPS mission will be relevant to contemporary America by engaging the public, developing a seamless network of parks, and protecting America's cultural heritage.

Source: *National Park Service Legacy Initiative and 4-Year Plan: Doing Business in the 21st Century*

National Parks

Park visitation and economic impact

Virginia is located primarily in the NPS Northeast Region, with headquarters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, although areas of northern Virginia fall within the National Capital Region. The NPS Southeast Region, with headquarters in Atlanta, GA, administers the Blue Ridge Parkway and Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

Park visitation

Based on best available data, total visits to National Park Service sites in Virginia decreased slightly from 15,237,960 in fiscal year 2000 to 14,974,938 in fiscal year 2005, which is a decrease of 1.7 percent. Virginia trends are somewhat more encouraging than national

averages, which have seen a dramatic decrease in visitation at national parks since visitation peaked in the late 1980s. This decrease in visitation has resulted in a reduction in funds. Changes in visitation to NPS parks in Virginia between 2000 and 2005 are shown in Table IX-. Visitation data on multi-state park units is also provided.

Economic impact

NPS sites contribute to the economic health of the Commonwealth and its communities through visitor spending. The Travel Industry of America reported \$13.3 billion in statewide travel expenditures in Virginia in 2005. Spending at NPS sites in Virginia was reported at \$263 million in 2005, resulting in approximately 2 percent of total travel expenditures in the state. NPS

Table IX-1. Recreational Visits to NPS Sites in Virginia: Fiscal Years 2000 and 2005

	FY00 Visits	FY05 Visits	% change
Appomattox Court House National Historic Park	194,983	142,012	- 27%
Arlington House, R.E. Lee Memorial	356,110	495,948	39%
Booker T. Washington National Monument	21,453	17,181	- 20%
Colonial National Historic Park	3,133,647	3,339,020	6.5%
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park	491,156	532,369	6.5%
George Washington Birthplace National Monument	135,738	61,903	- 54%
George Washington Memorial Parkway	7,685,862	7,327,162	- 5%
Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site	9,364	8,560	- 8.5%
Manassas National Battlefield Park	700,941	718,713	2.5%
Petersburg National Battlefield	173,385	149,911	- 13.5%
Prince William Forest Park	172,222	232,558	35%
Richmond National Battlefield Park	93,360	140,818	50%
Shenandoah National Park	1,363,348	1,141,102	- 16%
Theodore Roosevelt Island	178,795	106,237	- 40%
Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts	527,596	561,444	6%
Total Visitation at Multi-State Park Units			
Assateague Island National Seashore (MD and VA)	1,803,138	2,014,428	12%
Blue Ridge Parkway (NC and VA)	19,399,689	17,548,387	- 9.5%
Cumberland Gap (KY and VA)	1,519,504	1,020,732	- 32%
No data available for the Appalachian Trail, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, and Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park. (Source: NPS Public Use Statistics Office)			

Table IX-2. Economic Impact of National Parks in Virginia: Results from the NPS Money Generation Model

	FY05 Rec Visits	Impact to Local Economy (\$000's)	Local jobs supported
Appomattox Court House National Historic Park	142,012	7,662	182
Arlington House, R.E. Lee Memorial	495,948	30,320	664
Booker T. Washington National Monument	17,181	1,476	35
Colonial National Historic Park	3,339,020	47,052	1044
Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park	532,369	27,482	631
George Washington Birthplace National Monument	61,903	4,151	100
George Washington Memorial Parkway	7,327,162	12,465	333
Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site	8,560	90	2
Manassas National Battlefield Park	718,713	13,667	302
Petersburg National Battlefield	149,911	9,140	211
Prince William Forest Park	232,558	8,200	199
Shenandoah National Park	1,141,102	52,643	1,309
Theodore Roosevelt Island	106,237	6,302	136
Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts	561,444	36,246	813
<i>No data available for the Appalachian Trail, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, Richmond National Battlefield, and Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park.</i>			
<i>(Source: NPS Public Use Statistics Office)</i>			

spending was derived from the sum of direct, indirect and induced effects through the National Park Service Money Generation Model 2 (MGM2). This increase in expenditures supported 6,100 jobs in the local economy. Economic impact per park is provided in Table IX-2. (Note: Multi-state parks Cumberland Gap (KY), Blue Ridge Parkway (NC) and Assateague Island (MD) are included in KY, NC and MD data reports, and not included in Virginia's total impact figure.)

National parks and partnership programs

In Virginia, the National Park Service manages 20 parks that have a combined acreage of approximately 400,000 acres. Although the majority of sites are historic, the greatest percentage of this acreage is natural and recreational areas, including Shenandoah National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway, Prince William Forest Park and the Assateague Island National Seashore. The table lists the national parks in Virginia and each are described in the regional recommendations section of this plan.

National Park Service related areas

Appalachian National Scenic Trail

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is a 2,175-mile long footpath stretching through 14 states from Maine to Georgia. Trail planning began in 1921, was first completed in 1937, and was named America's first National Scenic Trail in 1968. The Appalachian Trail (AT) is managed cooperatively by the National Park Service, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), volunteers from 30 local AT Clubs, the USDA Forest Service, and other federal and state land-managing agency partners.

Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District

A National Heritage Area is a part of the country's landscape that has been recognized by Congress for its unique contribution to the American experience. In 1996, Congress established the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District as a means to protect, interpret and promote 10 critical Civil War battlefields in the valley, and related historic and natural sites in an eight-county area. This is the only National

National Parks

Heritage Area in Virginia. In this same area, Congress is considering recognition of the thematic trail Journey Through Hallowed Ground (see chapter VII-E: Scenic Highways and Virginia Byways).

The National Park Service affiliated areas

Affiliated areas comprise a variety of locations that preserve significant properties outside the National Park System. Some of these have been recognized by Congress; others have been designated national historic sites by the Secretary of the Interior under authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935. There are three NPS affiliated areas in Virginia: Green Springs National Historic Landmark District, Jamestown National Historic Site and Red Hill Patrick Henry National Monument.

Virginia's National Parks

National Parks of the Northeast Region

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park
Assateague Island National Seashore
Booker T. Washington National Monument
Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National
Historical Park
Colonial National Historical Park
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National
Military Park
George Washington Birthplace National Monument
Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
Petersburg National Battlefield
Richmond National Battlefield
Shenandoah National Park

National Parks of the National Capitol Region

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial
George Washington Memorial Parkway
Manassas National Battlefield Park
Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail
Prince William Forest Park
Theodore Roosevelt Island Park
Wolf Trap Farm National Park for the Performing Arts

National Parks of the Southeast Region

Blue Ridge Parkway
Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

Partnership programs

In addition to units of the National Park Service and related areas, NPS enhances the recreation and tourism of states, communities and private organizations through its partnership programs. These programs work with agencies, nonprofits and the private sector to protect natural and cultural resources and to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, wellness activities, tourism and education.

NPS provides the following programs in Virginia:

- American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP)
- Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network
- Chesapeake Watershed Assistance Program
- Ferry Farm Special Resource Study
- Historic American Buildings Survey, Historic American Engineering Record
- Historic Surplus Property
- Land and Water Conservation Fund Program (LWCF)
- Monument Research and Preservation
- National Historic Landmarks (NHL)
- National Natural Landmarks (NNL)
- Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA)
- Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR)

The benefits of these community partnership programs are extensive and far-reaching throughout the Commonwealth. For example, since 1966, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has contributed \$79 million through land purchase and protection of parks and open space. Recent projects include campgrounds at James River State Park and boating facilities at Leesylvania State Park, as well as sports fields, picnic areas and trails at Page County's first county-owned park.

The National Park Service's Federal Lands to Parks Program helps communities create new parks and recreation areas by transferring surplus federal land at no cost to state and local governments. Since 1949, 38 properties have been conveyed to Virginia, which totaled 5,294 acres and appraised for more than \$32 million. The most recent transfers are the 115-acre portion of the Lorton Correctional Complex in Fairfax County; a 136.57-acre parcel at Naval Radio

Transmitting Facility in Suffolk; and the 18.5-acre portion of Vint Hill Farms Station in Fauquier County.

The American Battlefields Protection Program (ABPP) fosters opportunities for stewardship of historic battlefields through grants and technical assistance that support public and private partners in identifying, evaluating and planning for preservation. Twelve grants in 10 states were awarded \$387,975 in the national 2004 grant round. Two of the 12 awardees are for Virginia Battlefields: to Buckland Preservation Society for the Buckland Mills Battlefield and to Radford University for the Saltville Battlefields. In 2006, the Town of Appomattox received \$34,000 in funding for the Appomattox Station Battlefield.

Since 2000, the Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance Program has assisted more than 50 projects, consultation, workshops, conferences, and other recreation and conservation initiatives in Virginia. This assistance provides education, helps create trails and greenways, conserve rivers, and protect open space and scenic viewsheds. In addition, the newly created Chesapeake Watershed Assistance Program has assisted three watershed management planning projects in Virginia.

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network is a system of sites providing opportunities to enjoy, learn about and help conserve the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. There are currently 43 sites and nine water trails in Virginia. In 2005, grants through the Gateways Program to Virginia communities totaled \$384,000.

Issues and challenges facing National Park Service sites in Virginia

The “no impairment” clause in the Organic Act of 1916 differentiates management of the National Park System from other public land management agencies. In order to accomplish this mission, NPS managers are confronted by numerous challenges. These include the adverse impact from growth adjacent to park boundaries, protection of natural and cultural resources within the park while allowing for visitor uses, and regional issues such as transportation, water quality and air quality.

Challenge of land protection and impacts from encroaching development

The impact of development on adjacent land is an issue for many parks in Virginia where the quality of the visitor experience is often dependent on compati-

ble land use planning and zoning by local jurisdictions. For example, Cedar Creek and other Civil War Battlefields in the Shenandoah Valley are losing their integrity and setting due to changes in land use and new developments. Other examples include encroaching development at Booker T Washington National Monument, Manassas National Battlefield, and Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

Impacts from transportation planning and state highways that bisect parkland

Highway impacts are a concern at numerous NPS sites in Virginia. Some of these impacts are from proposed new construction or roadway expansion, such as impacts to Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania National Battlefield from a proposed four lane highway that would cut through the heart of Wilderness Battlefield. Another example is the impact on Booker T. Washington National Monument by the future widening of State Highway 122 from two to four lanes. The previous VOP recommended that the highway become a Scenic Byway, but with recent development around Smith Mountain Lake, the roadway may be losing the qualities required for designation.

In addition, NPS sites are impacted by existing roadways that bisect park sites. A good example is VA State Route 24, which bisects Appomattox Court House NHP. The VDOT objective is to move traffic efficiently and quickly, while NPS strives to preserve cultural landscapes. The conflict in mission and jurisdiction of resources between VDOT and NPS creates challenges for the park in managing visitor safety and enjoyment, as well as resource protection within its boundaries. A partnership for the management of resources should be developed to better accomplish the goals of both organizations.

Impacts from regional environmental challenges

Various environmental issues that are regional in nature, such as degraded air quality, soundscapes and night sky pollution, impact the parks in Virginia. For example, a major concern at Shenandoah National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway has been air quality. Winds coming into the southern Appalachians carry emissions from the Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, the industrial cities of the Southeast and states surrounding the Gulf of Mexico. This has led to increased haze and severely reduced the distance visitors can see from overlooks on Skyline Drive and on the parkway.

A comprehensive report was recently completed for Shenandoah NP that identifies major source areas that contribute air pollution to the park. Also included were the results of various emission reduction modeling scenarios on stream chemistry, forest growth and composition, and visibility impairment. The report's conclusions were consistent with previous studies that significant emission reductions will be required to reverse existing adverse impacts on park resources.

Monitoring the health of park resources

Fiscal constraints have led to an inability to effectively monitor the ecological health of some park resources, notably wetlands. This challenge is illustrated by a recent report of the Mid-Atlantic Network Vital Signs initiative (MIDN). The goal of the project is to monitor the condition of natural resources at the parks through targeted "vital signs." In collaboration with the MIDN Science Advisory Committee, a process was formulated for identifying and prioritizing 20 vital signs. Five vital signs relate to air and climate, two relate to geology and soils, four relate to water, eight relate to biological integrity, and one to ecosystem pattern and processes. Four protocols are targeted for implementation by the network, including air quality, weather, water quality and forest health. Four other protocols are considered high priority, but will not be implemented due to current funding levels, including riparian areas and wetlands, land cover and land use, amphibians, and breeding birds.

NPS superintendents in Virginia have raised the concern that wetlands will not be included in the monitoring protocol. It is hoped that this gap may be addressed through collaboration with other surrounding networks, land management agencies, nonprofits and other collaborators.

Challenge of protecting park resources while allowing for compatible recreational use

Visitor services and recreational use must be compatible with the purpose of the park and managed in a manner that does not impair park resources. Accomplishing this goal and communicating the rationale behind management decisions to the public and other interests is a constant challenge for NPS managers. In the past, misunderstandings have occurred where park managers have not allowed expansion of recreational uses at some historic sites or monuments because the uses were found to be incompatible with preserving the park's natural and cultural resources. For example, there is interest in increased boater access at George Washington Birthplace National Monument. NPS believes this

action would adversely impact the historic setting and cultural landscape of the Potomac River plantation where the first president was born and spent the first few years of his life.

Opportunities and future directions

Visitor enjoyment and appreciation for opportunities provided through the National Park Service is essential to its conservation. The NPS embraces its critical responsibility to provide appropriate outdoor recreation and to contribute to the physical and mental well-being of all Americans. Future opportunities in Virginia include collaborative efforts to develop a network of parks and open space across the Commonwealth, protection of NPS sites and resources, and expansion of opportunities through research, planning, dialogue and implementation of new initiatives to meet current and future needs.

Developing a seamless network of parks, trails and open space

Cooperative regional trail and greenway planning

The *Virginia Outdoors Survey* confirms that walking for pleasure is the most popular recreational pursuit in the state, with 73 percent of the population participating. Based on survey findings, the second most popular activity was visiting historic sites, which jumped from fifth to second place with 56 percent participating. NPS units recognize this need in Virginia and are positioned to play an active role in connecting park sites through multi-modal transportation networks. Facilities such as trails and greenways allow for bicycling and walking, reduce traffic congestion and promote healthful family activities, while learning about and exploring Virginia's heritage.

Several parks have been working on trail connections:

- Petersburg National Battlefield has been working with Dinwiddie County and other partners to connect battlefields through trails.
- Appomattox Courthouse National Historic Park is working with the Town of Appomattox and Appomattox County to develop a network of trails to connect community and park resources.
- Blue Ridge Parkway is working with local partners in Roanoke to assess trail connections.
- Richmond National Battlefield Park is working with the Civil War Trail Program to connect Civil War battlefields, and with the City of Richmond and other museums to establish an urban trail of Civil War sites.

- Colonial Parkway and Richmond National Battlefield Park are key destinations and anchors on the Virginia Capital Trail, a 50-mile interpretive, recreation and transportation trail under development to connect the Capitol at Richmond to the Colonial Capitol at Williamsburg.

These trails will provide access to a diverse array of natural, cultural, historical and recreational sites, museums, parks, refuges, water trails, and interpretive and orientation facilities.

Gateways community initiatives

Park units in Virginia are advancing efforts to work outside park boundaries. A pilot program in the Northeast Region has introduced the community partnership workshop process for parks engaged in general management planning. The workshops bring together community leaders, local officials, agency representatives, adjacent landowners and others who have a special interest in the park. Workshops are convened with the goal of identifying issues, assets and opportunities shared by the park and community and formulating an action agenda through which mutual benefits can be realized. The two parks participating in the pilot program are George Washington Birthplace National Monument, which is beginning its General Management Plan, and Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, which is completing its plan.

Building partnerships through regional networks

The National Park Service Legacy Goals identify the need for development of partnerships to extend the benefits of resource protection and outdoor recreation beyond park boundaries. An example is the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Program, which is a developing network of sites that provide opportunities to enjoy, learn about and help conserve the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail is another example of NPS efforts to develop sustainable partnerships with local communities, connecting nationally significant natural and cultural features along a 700-mile corridor of the Potomac River from the Chesapeake Bay to the Allegheny Highlands.

In addition, NPS has supported cooperative planning efforts led by state agencies and nonprofit partners to enable residents and visitors to learn about and explore Virginia's natural and cultural resources. Two examples are the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail and the Virginia Civil War Trail. Both of these initiatives unite sites into an interpretive network benefiting both visitors to the area, as well as local economies. Another collaborative effort is the Captain John Smith

Chesapeake National Historic Trail. For more information on this National Historic Trail see Chapter VII: Water Access and Blueways. NPS units and programs in Virginia have lent their assistance and support to development of these networks and will continue to explore avenues for future collaboration.

Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

www.baygateways.net

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is a partnership system of parks, refuges, museums, historic sites and water trails spanning the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This linkage of natural, cultural, historical and recreational sites is designed to help the public access, enjoy, understand and appreciate the natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources and values of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The program also promotes citizen involvement and stewardship projects at each of the network locations and throughout the Bay watershed. This network is managed as a guide and entry point for experiencing and learning about the Chesapeake Bay. The program represents a partnership, not only with sites throughout the Bay watershed, but also with state and local governments, to expand understanding and appreciation of the Bay so more citizens will become an integral part in conservation and restoration efforts. The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network changes how people perceive the Bay by interpreting its resources in a meaningful manner to create a broader commitment to conserve and restore the Bay's natural environment.



Chesapeake Bay Gateways Program James River Water Trail recognition. Photo by NPS.

Protecting park natural and cultural resources

NPS will continue to place a high priority on protection, restoration, and stewardship of the natural and cultural resources entrusted to NPS by the citizens of the United States. In the future, there will be a continued emphasis on partnerships with educational institutions, intergovernmental organizations, and others to accomplish this goal as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

Partnerships previously discussed in this section include the protection of scenic vistas and battlefield resources, dialogue with state transportation planners, and research and monitoring of ecosystem health.

New initiatives

"The National Park Service embraces its critical responsibility to provide appropriate outdoor recreation and to contribute to the physical and mental well-being of all Americans. We will provide these opportunities both through the National Park System itself, and through our role in a seamless network of parks throughout the country."

—National Park Service Director Fran Mainella

Health and wellness

Increasingly, scientific evidence points to the fact that the American public needs to increase its level of physical activity to improve overall health and well-being. Recreation opportunities in parks and along rivers, trails and greenways are ideally suited for meeting this need. In March 2006, the National Park System Advisory Board Committee on Health and Recreation released its findings regarding the role of National Parks in promoting and providing healthful recreational activities. The report identifies seven pilot projects where parks are conducting health and activity research and will test the effectiveness of communications that encourage people to become more active.

In addition, the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program has launched a national initiative to encourage healthful outdoor physical activity through partnerships with local communities. RTCA is working with Active Living by Design, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state and local partners to expand trail and bike-pedestrian infrastructure, and promote the use and health benefits of local parks and trails to support healthy lifestyles.

Green infrastructure

Green infrastructure is an interconnected network of protected land and water that supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health and quality of life for America's communities and people. Efforts are underway by DCR, Virginia Department of Forestry and others to promote green infrastructure planning as a strategic approach to conservation, utilizing an ecosystem-based process of community involvement and science.

Green infrastructure planning supports NPS units by recognizing the value and function of protected resource lands as a component of a broader landscape network. Likewise, NPS units can play a role in supporting and assisting the creation of these physical networks to connect critical resource lands. In addition, support can be provided through the RTCA program, which is tasked with "implementing the natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation mission of the National Park Service in communities across America." RTCA has launched a partnership with The Conservation Fund to support the development of community-based green infrastructure networks.

Special Studies: Captain John Smith Water Trail, and New River Wild and Scenic River.

There are two recent NPS study initiatives in Virginia:

- The U.S. Congress created the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail with more than 2,300-miles of water trail throughout the Bay area. This is the nation's first all-water national historic trail and will commemorate Captain John Smith's 1607 to 1609 exploration of the Chesapeake Bay
- A study of the New River is underway to determine its eligibility for Wild and Scenic River designation.

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